Learning Communities:

A New Approach to Creating Resilient and Sustainable Communities

September 2000

BRITISH COLUMBIA

Ministry of Community Development, Cooperatives and Volunteers

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Message from the Minister

Our ministry was created in August 1999 to promote, support and invest in community efforts that encourage all British Columbians – of all ages and from all walks of life – to build and maintain healthy, resilient and sustainable communities.

In the short history of our ministry, we have created a number of programs that provide support to communities across this province. This is no easy task given the cultural and economic diversity of B.C. From Vancouver's Downtown Eastside to Dawson Creek to Gold River – we are helping British Columbians to build stronger communities. Each community, each town in this province is different, with distinct challenges and priorities. That's why this ministry was created; it's not a one size fits all approach, but rather it's about communities identifying their priorities and working with our ministry to achieve their goals.

Recently we started work, in consultation with communities across B.C., on a new policy and legislative framework for community development in this province that will enable communities themselves, at the local level, to make changes and improvements to their social and economic structures. This is a move away from "top down" management from on high, to government working with communities so the impetus for community change comes from local, grassroots-level ideas and projects.

Today there are many theories about, and many different approaches to, community development. The learning communities approach is just one of them, but we believe it offers tremendous promise both for the people and the communities of this province.

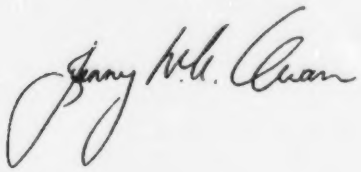
The learning communities approach involves communities taking individual community development projects (most of which relate in some way to learning) and building them into a comprehensive plan that takes into account not just specific local problems – such as an impending plant closure – but also such core social issues as poverty and its lasting effects on generations of British Columbians.

A learning community believes that learning must be an integral part of community planning and development if that community is to rise to the challenge of a new global economy – an economy based not on resources, as in the past, but on people and their ability to acquire new knowledge and learn new skills.

The learning communities approach is, at essence, a people-centred approach to community development. The Upper Skeena area of B.C., which has already declared itself a learning community, describes it this way: "Economic

development will go hand-in-hand with the development of active and informed citizens. By investing in people and building human capacity we will be able to create the changes we envision for the future."

This document provides an introduction to the concept of organized learning communities and an overview of its primary benefits. It also outlines our intention to collaborate with the federal government to make sure communities have timely and efficient access to the funding they need to reach a healthy, resilient and sustainable future.



Jenny Wai Ching Kwan
Minister of Community Development, Cooperatives and Volunteers

Introduction

A New Economy

Today's communications and information technology has succeeded in creating what many thought was impossible: a new global economy based on knowledge rather than capital assets or natural resources. And this has significant implications – personal, social and economic – for virtually every person in every community.

Here in British Columbia, the new, knowledge-based global economy is causing whole industries to re-structure and realign, and almost every kind of workplace to shift in some way: large (eliminating some jobs or adding new jobs with entirely different skills), and small (requiring current employees to upgrade or re-train – often more than once).

As a result, a number of B.C.'s rural, coastal and resource communities are in the middle of a precarious and difficult balancing act to keep their economies going and their people employed, while urban centres, too, are seeing a rise in the number of people living on the fringes of society, without the skills they need to find employment or participate meaningfully in their communities.

To survive this kind of dramatic and substantial change, both individuals and communities must look at new approaches to personal and community development – approaches that take into account the social, economic and environmental realities facing British Columbia today.

> *"...we must purposefully re-direct our economy in a way that will build on our strengths and retain what we care deeply about – our quality of life and outstanding natural heritage. At the same time, British Columbians must prepare themselves to participate in the new economy in which skills, creativity, and human capacities will more than ever provide the foundation for success."*
>
> *– Jobs and the Environment: Moving British Columbia into the 21st Century, Ministry of the Environment, Lands and Parks, July 2000*

Learning Communities and the New Economy

The creation of organized "learning communities" is one approach to preparing for and adapting to a new, knowledge-based global economy.

Learning communities are communities that recognize the importance of actively supporting and promoting opportunities for all citizens to acquire new knowledge and new skills throughout their lives – that lifelong learning is the foundation not only for personal growth and development, but also for continued community health and prosperity.

Learning communities believe that learning is an essential part of community development, and that it works as both a preventative and a proactive measure:

- preventative in helping people of all ages become and remain productive members of society and thus helping communities avoid costly remedial education, health care, criminal justice system and welfare costs; and
- proactive in providing opportunities for people to acquire marketable skills that will help both them and their communities adjust to a changing economy.

Community development

Community development is collaborative, collective action taken by local people to enhance the long-term social, economic and environmental conditions of their community.

The primary goal of community development is to create a better overall quality of life for everyone within the community.

Learning communities also believe that learning can and should be adaptable, accessible and available to people where and how they need it. Formal classroom learning should be only one component of a densely woven network of education and training. Others include a range of partners: local governments, libraries, museums, community groups, voluntary and health organizations, private-sector businesses and individuals.

Formal learning

Formal learning is planned or organized learning, taking place usually in a classroom at a school or sometimes a workplace, delivered by a teacher or trainer, and leading to credit or certification of some kind.

A university degree or college diploma is gained through formal learning; so is a First Aid or Heavy Equipment Operator certificate.

Non-formal learning

Non-formal learning is also planned, but can take place anywhere – in the home, a volunteer organization or workplace, for example – and does not lead to a formal credit or certificate.

Training taken to be a volunteer on a Help Line or to become a better parent, or to find out how to start up a cooperative are all examples of non-formal learning.

Learning Communities also believe that learning is not just an expenditure, but an investment that will lead to significant individual, economic and environmental benefits.

"As the twentieth century draws to a close, leaders from all segments of society – including the business world – are realizing that our future prosperity, if not our very survival, will depend on new ways of thinking and new economic models that integrate environment and economy."

"...whereas in the old economy, workers went to where industry was located, in the new economy, workers decide where they want to live and the industries follow them there."

– Jobs and the Environment: Moving British Columbia into the 21st Century, Ministry of the Environment, Lands and Parks, July 2000

B.C. Experiences: Recent Community Education Projects

The idea of B.C. communities initiating and encouraging individual learning projects – with financial support from the provincial government – for the betterment of their citizens and as a central part of community development is not new.

For example:

First Nations

Since 1989, five B.C. partners – the Cowichan Tribes, the Nzen man Child and Family Service of Lytton, the Tl azt en Nation of Tache, the Treaty 8 Tribal Association of Fort St. John and the Mount Currie First Nation – have worked with the University of Victoria and with partners in Saskatchewan to develop, deliver and evaluate a community-based, bi-cultural course leading to a diploma in Child and Youth Care.

The program is delivered in the students' own communities, with local people contributing much of the teaching. The course curriculum itself blends the best of Western theory, research and practice with the First Nations' own child-rearing traditions and practice, resulting in a program that not only provides graduates with marketable skills and contributes to the optimal development of children and youth, but also supports community culture.

A recent evaluation of the diploma program indicated that:

- 60 to 100 per cent of students completed the course, far higher than the national average (below 40 per cent) for First Nations post-secondary students;
- 95 per cent of graduates chose to remain in their own communities;
- 65 per cent of graduates were employed in human service-related occupations five months after their program ended;
- over 90 per cent of graduates reported an improvement in their parenting or grand-parenting skills; and
- at least 80 per cent of program expenditures remained within the community.

A number of students also reported that the program helped them develop new, mutually supportive relationships with elders in their communities and, of those who suffered ill effects from residential schooling, most reported significant healing and recovery of cultural identity and pride. Many have gone on to become leading community advocates for children and youth.

Valemount

In 1994, the Village of Valemount's new Economic Development Plan identified the development of a Learning Centre as a priority to help the community overcome recent boom and bust cycles in the forest industry. Since then, the Learning Centre has delivered a series of training programs funded by the provincial and federal governments, including a contract to deliver a computer training program for mill workers.

In 1999, the College of New Caledonia agreed to work with the Learning Centre to develop and run a Northern Outdoor Recreation Certificate course to provide local people with the skills they need to move into the growing adventure tourism market.

Salmon Arm

In 1997, a community-based organization in Salmon Arm that provides services to the unemployed started the "Co-Opportunities" project to support the development of new cooperatives, as a way both to provide more opportunities for self-employment and to help the local economy to diversify. The project provides participants with education and training, skills assessment, marketing support, help with research and development and access to microloans/equity pools.

Today, 14 co-ops are at various stages of development: three have been or will be incorporated shortly; two have completed their business plans; and nine are at early developmental or formative stages. The new businesses range from an organic milling co-op, a value-added woods co-op and one providing automotive repair, to a co-op producing herbal products and something called the Virtually Anything Co-op, offering a range of services to small home-based or other co-op businesses.

"... success rates for co-operatives are higher than the success rates for small businesses. For example, a Canadian study found that the 5 year survival rate for co-operatives was 64% (as compared to 36% for regular businesses) and the 10 year survival rate was 46% (as compared to 20% for regular businesses)."

– Co-Opportunities Project Report, Salmon Arm

Burns Lake

The Lakes District Campus of the College of New Caledonia in Burns Lake is working to meet the needs of a community challenged by Fetal Alcohol Syndrome/Fetal Alcohol Effect (FAS/FAE) by creating specially designed prevention and support programs in collaboration with a variety of government and community partners, including the Lake Babine Nation.

The FAS/FAE project's advisory committee includes representatives from Babine Forest Products and other local businesses, the local school district, Burns Lake Community Development Association, Lake Babine Health and Social Services Department, parents and health professionals.

In support of the Burns Lake FAS/FAE project and to contribute to community awareness, the local Weldwood forest plant shut down for one hour of each of its three shifts for a public education presentation to its workers on the dangers of a pregnant woman drinking, focusing on FAS/FAE.

The firm considers the cost – $250,000 in lost wages and production – well worth it: they know that breaking the cycle of harmful parenting not only saves an infant victim but also over as much as $1 million in down-stream special education, health and other social costs normally expended over the life of each victim.

Vancouver

The University of British Columbia began offering Humanities 101 – a credit liberal arts program covering history, philosophy, art , performing arts and literature – for residents of Vancouver's Downtown Eastside in 1998 after two UBC students read about a similar program in New York City's Lower East Side. There, a man named Earl Shorris came up with the idea after an inmate in a women's prison told him the poor needed "a moral alternative to the street" to be able to rise above their circumstances. Program graduates, none of whom had any previous higher education, have since gone on to post-secondary studies or full-time jobs.

The UBC program follows much the same format as the original: to qualify, students must have no previous university experience, little likelihood of access to a university owing to either educational or

economic factors, and enough literacy to read a newspaper. The program provides students with meals, bus passes, child care, books and other resources.

In the first year, 19 of 23 students (all of them high school drop-outs) completed the UBC program. Most reported that it had helped them discover they were indeed capable of learning; several have now gone on to further studies through UBC's continuing education department, and one won a scholarship to a Christian theology college.

> *The aim of Humanities 101 is "to offer non-vocational training that empowers students to use critical thinking in everyday life and inspire a passion for lifelong learning ... we believe that teaching critical thinking skills is just as valid as teaching specific job skills."*
>
> *– Allison Dunnett, one of two UBC students who helped to plan Humanities 101, UBC Reports, March 19, 1998*

The University of Victoria began its own Humanities 101 program in January 2000, using space donated by the Cool-Aid Society in downtown Victoria, eliminating the need for participants to travel to the university. The provincial Ministry of Social Development and Economic Security is providing funding to cover child care and meals.

The Learning Communities Approach

What is new about learning communities is, rather than developing single, one-off projects that support a specific aspect of learning, communities begin to build an integrated series of programs or initiatives – all of them designed to provide opportunities for continuous, lifelong learning.

Lifelong learning

For individuals, lifelong learning is the opportunity to participate in formal and non-formal learning experiences throughout their lives.

For communities, it is the opportunity to increase the capacity and flexibility of the workforce, and to promote a better-informed, more inclusive and healthier citizenry.

Most of the recent community education projects in B.C. are helping to resolve single or isolated problems, with the support of only a limited number of community stakeholders.

The learning communities approach is a way of taking a number of isolated projects and rolling them into an integrated and comprehensive community plan – a plan that is supported by a wide range of community partners, and that works to address not just one specific issue but also the deeper, long-standing issues affecting community health, such as poverty and chronic unemployment.

Origins

The idea for organized learning communities dates from 1992, when the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) held a conference in Gothenberg, Sweden to discuss ways to meet the twin objectives of economic development and social inclusion.

"... learning, the production and use of knowledge, and the deployment of new information and communication technologies are essential for maintaining competitiveness in our global economy – for an enterprise, a city or a region."

– OECD seminar on "Competitive Strength and Social Cohesion Through Learning Cities and Regions," Paris, January 26 – 27, 1997

Since then, more than 100 learning cities or regions have been declared, over 40 in Great Britain alone.

All these learning communities have at their foundation the basic belief that learning holds the key to building local capacity, and all 100 share some core characteristics:

- a clearly stated, specific purpose;
- a clear and sustained commitment from public authorities, private enterprises, education and research institutions, voluntary organizations and individuals to set learning at the heart of the city/region's development;
- a development strategy that supports a range of formal and non-formal learning opportunities – as well as a range of community partnerships to deliver that learning – and actively encourages participation from across the community;
- a determination to create globally competitive, knowledge-intensive industrial and service enterprises; and
- an emphasis on social cohesion and environmental sustainability as an integral part of the city/region's development.

In 1997, the British government declared education as its highest priority and the centre of its efforts to create an economically competitive and socially inclusive nation for the 21st century, knowledge-based economy.

The government's new and comprehensive lifelong learning strategy includes:

- *the Sure Start program, focussing on quality pre-natal to pre-school learning for parents and children;*
- *a National Learning Grid made up of 2,000 electronic learning centres; and*
- *a new University for Industry for employees of small- to medium-sized enterprises.*

The Community Learning Network

Here in Canada, too, a number of communities have formally declared themselves learning communities. Still others have joined the Community Learning Network, with funding from the federal government's Office of Learning Technologies (OLT).

Human Resources Development Canada established the OLT in 1996 to raise awareness of the opportunities, challenges and benefits of learning technologies. In 1999, the OLT announced the Community Learning Network (CLN) initiative to support time-limited, community-based pilot projects that promote the imaginative use of learning technologies and work to create a culture of lifelong learning for their citizens. A key CLN objective is to provide alternative learning opportunities for people who tend not to do well in formal education settings and who are at risk of being marginalized in the new knowledge-based economy.

Learning technologies

Learning technologies are technologies – such as computers, CD-ROMs, the Internet and video conferencing – that enhance or enable learning beyond the standard, strictly classroom-based approach.

Learning technologies allows more learners, particularly those who live in remote areas, those with full-time jobs and busy schedules, and those who do not respond well to structured learning environments, to take advantage of opportunities to gain new knowledge and skills.

Under the CLN, up to $25,000 in direct funding is available for the developmental phase of an approved pilot project, and up to $100,000 per year over three years for full pilot implementation.

To date, a number of B.C. communities – including the resource-based communities of Upper Skeena and the Lumby and Lillooet areas – have applied for and received CLN initiative funding.

"Key CLN components are:

- *the use of technologies as tools to support and enable learning and networking;*
- *a strong community participation or community control at the local level; and*
- *the promotion of individual and community development."*

– http://olt-bta.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/CLN

Upper Skeena

Just over 6,500 people live in 14 villages scattered throughout the valleys of the Upper Skeena region in northwestern B.C. Most – 70 per cent – are members of the Gitxsan First Nation, and most – over 60 per cent – are under 30 years old. The region's economy remains largely dependent on a diminishing stock of natural resources, which has contributed to an unemployment rate in recent years of 40 to 70 per cent in some villages.

In 1999, a community-based steering committee, with members from both the local government and the Gitxsan Treaty Office, presented a proposal for CLN initiative funding focussed on meeting four major goals:

- creating connections and pathways between formal, non-formal and informal learning and socio-economic development initiatives;
- strengthening the capacity for local decision-making and control to direct the future of the Upper Skeena;
- building a practice of communicating ideas, sharing information and working together among the various sectors and groups in the community to create changes in the socio-economic realities of the community and to foster community spirit; and
- using learning technologies to promote collaborative, lifelong learning and community economic development.

With CLN funding in hand, the region has now completed several pilot service-learning projects, designed to help Upper Skeena youth, both in school and out, to learn new skills and gain a new appreciation for their community and its values. In one project, local high school students learned the skills they needed to plan and complete a new ski/hiking trail. Now several of the students involved say they have changed their attitudes toward learning and have decided to seek further education.

Service learning

Service learning is where a person, often young and at risk, gains new knowledge and new skills by working with a community, volunteer or not-for-profit organization or project.

Some schools – secondary and post-secondary – have begun to incorporate service learning into their curricula, requiring students to complete a certain amount of community service to receive full credit.

The community now plans further service-learning projects, including a joint project that will use the Internet to connect a youth team led by Gitxsan students at the University of Northern B.C. with local college and high school students, and a combined service-learning/outdoor education project for at-risk youth. The Upper Skeena is also now planning to use

CLN funding to explore the possibilities of developing small-scale cooperatives, and of strengthening pre-natal and early childhood education programs.

Lumby

The Village of Lumby, located in the North Okanagan near the Monashee mountain range, has a population of approximately 1,500, with an additional 8,500 living in nearby villages and farms. With the closure of the largest local sawmill in 1999, and the loss of 220 jobs, unemployment in and around Lumby has risen to almost 20 per cent. Thirty per cent of area families are considered low income (twice the provincial average) and almost 25 per cent of families are led by a single parent (again, twice the provincial average). Only nine per cent of local adults have continued their education past Grade 9, and only three per cent have received a post-secondary degree.

Even before the CLN initiative was announced, the community repeatedly identified the need for local access to learning – particularly skills training for entrepreneurs and to meet the needs of existing local employers (such as value-added wood manufacturers and log-home builders) and continuing education in such subjects as basic literacy. When the community heard about the CLN, a local partnership with representatives from local government, businesses, community groups, the local library, museum and school district, the Open Learning Agency and Okanagan University College submitted a proposal for CLN funding.

This proposal identified the development of a multi-purpose, one-stop Learning Centre – a physical centre of learning for the entire community – as the community's highest priority.

Lumby has now used its CLN developmental funding to further define the detailed purpose, structure, location and costs of the Monashee Centre, as well as to gather even more community partners. The community is now awaiting the OLT's response to its application for three-year funding. The community's proposed pilot projects – to be operated out of the new Centre – include having local computer science students help seniors in an intermediate care facility learn how to use the Internet.

Lillooet

3,000 people live in the Village of Lillooet, with an additional 3,000 – including the members of six First Nations – in surrounding rural areas. Like the Upper Skeena and Lumby, Lillooet's once-thriving forest industry has now significantly diminished.

In 1999 the University College of the Cariboo, supported by over a dozen community organizations, represented the community in successfully applying for a CLN initiative grant. In January 2000, they used their development grant to hire a two-person consultant team to work in-depth with local people on further determining the community's needs and assets.

The consultants confirmed two primary needs:

- for more extensive pre-natal education for parents and early childhood education for children; and
- for diversifying the local economy without detriment to the environment.

They also further identified the need to develop a more effective network of learning technologies – combining traditional learning with electronic and outreach opportunities – to meet the specific needs of people in First Nations, agricultural and remote communities.

A Learning Community Partnership steering committee, co-chaired by two local leaders, one of whom is the chief of the largest of the six Upper St'at'imc First Nation bands, recently completed its three-year business plan and submitted it to the OLT for consideration.

Lessons learned

From their experience with the Community Learning Network initiative to date, representatives from Upper Skeena, Lumby and Lillooet all agree on:

- *the need for senior government to provide coordinated and timely financial and technical assistance;*
- *the importance of local leadership in building the necessary cross-cultural bridges;*
- *the need to first identify community requirements and purposes, then gradually introduce appropriate learning technologies to meet those requirements and purposes;*
- *the value of using the expertise and experience of local people by encouraging non-formal as well as formal learning opportunities; and*
- *the wisdom of focusing on developing partnerships among community groups, on encouraging community involvement in planning and participation in activities, and on monitoring progress.*

They also agree that there is no quick fix or easy answer to preparing for a knowledge-based economy.

Government response

Up to now, communities have been able to apply for funding from the federal OLT program or from the provincial Community Enterprise and other programs, but generally not from both.

Both levels of government recognize that this is not an ideal situation, and that we need to find new ways to work together more efficiently, with greater communication and cooperation.

A new agreement between the federal and provincial governments will make it easier for B.C. communities to communicate with – and access funding from – both levels of government.

Benefits of the Integrated Approach: Why We Need Organized Learning Communities

Any kind of learning initiative is good, both for people and communities.

However, an organized and systematic approach to creating learning communities – communities that are committed, at all levels and in all sectors, to providing their citizens with opportunities to acquire new knowledge and skills throughout their lifetimes – can provide even greater cumulative benefits than the project-by-project approach.

> *"... people must learn continually in order to prosper economically."*
>
> *– Organization for Economic and Community Development, 1996*

Communities

For rural, coastal and resource communities, particularly, placing learning at the heart of community development can help with economic development and diversification.

There are a number of communities across B.C. that currently depend on one or perhaps two primary resources to provide their economic base. For these communities, the combination of recent declines in the demand for and prices of resource commodities and the restructuring of the forest and fishing industries has meant a significant decline in both individual jobs and overall community prosperity.

People who have the skills they need to move into new or different jobs can contribute to community economic growth by opening their own new businesses, or by making their communities more attractive to outside businesses looking for a place to establish themselves.

A skilled and knowledgeable populace also ensures that a community will have the leadership it needs not only to adjust to the realities of a new economy – to plan and implement major changes in economic and social focus – but also to a new relationship with senior governments. Governments are moving away from the top down, paternalistic approach of past years, towards a decentralized model where communities have a much greater say in determining their future goals and directions. But to do this well today takes in-depth knowledge and broad-based understanding, not only of the local community and its needs, but also of world economic forces and demands.

And for all communities – urban as well as rural and resource – the learning community approach is a critical method for encouraging the

inclusion of people who are currently marginalized, kept at the edges of society. Education is, indisputably, the best method known today to increase overall health, combat poverty and eliminate social exclusion.

Workers

"Brains are in, heavy lifting is out. That's true for today and it's true for tomorrow."

– David Roberts of Connect NB Branche, speaking at the First Pan-Canadian Forum on Community Learning Networks. 1998

At one time, people with basic secondary school education knew they could find stable, well-paying jobs for life in resource-based industries. But that day is over. Today, in our increasingly knowledge-based economy, more and more jobs require a much higher level of education and a very specific set of skills, which many British Columbians have simply not had the opportunity to acquire.

At the same time, simply learning a new set of skills once is not enough: with technology changing more and more rapidly, and with the fact that most people today will change jobs several times during their lifetimes, most workers will require continuous upgrading of their skills to retain their current jobs or find new ones.

A learning community offers people the chance to keep acquiring new knowledge and skills as they need them.

A 1998 survey by Angus Reid for the Information, Science and Technology Agency revealed that 30 per cent of British Columbians have no computer skills; the majority of this 30 per cent are from the bottom third of the economic ladder.

The survey also reveals that 25 per cent of British Columbians have never seen or accessed the Internet. This group includes:

- *49 per cent of those currently unemployed;*
- *55 per cent of people over age 55;*
- *44 per cent of low-income earners; and*
- *42 per cent of those with a limited formal education.*

– www.ista.gov.bc.ca

Parents and Children

We have known for a long time that good pre-natal care is vital to producing healthy babies. More recent research is also proving that the quality of care a child receives from birth to age five is just as important, and is the strongest predictor of success when that child enters the school system.

Studies have consistently shown that quality early childhood education and care:

- *decreases the downward drift in IQ that is frequently found among infants and toddlers raised in low-education, low-income families;*
- *lowers the rate of school drop-out and school failure;*
- *lowers the admission rate of children into special education programs;*
- *decreases the frequency of grade repetition for children from families of low socio-economic status;*
- *increases both the number of youth who graduate from high school and the number of years of vocational or college training beyond high school that they complete;*
- *lowers juvenile delinquency rates, thereby reducing court costs as well as victim and property costs;*
- *decreases the number of teenage single parents who drop out of high school;*
- *decreases the reliance on income assistance; and*
- *increases detection and treatment of health problems and decreases health costs through early detection.*

– "Research Report: The Positive Impact of Child Care in Early Intervention and Prevention (1997)," Unit for Child Care Research, School of Child and Youth Care, University of Victoria

A learning community supports parents to be better parents, with the result that their children are more likely to become healthy and productive adults. This in turn helps to break the cycle of poverty and produce citizens who are an asset to, rather than a drain on, the justice, health care and welfare systems, and the community as a whole.

"The most important intervention to improve the well-being of children, after the reduction of poverty, is the provision of stimulating and supportive care."

– B.C. Provincial Health Officer's Annual Report, 1997

"The better the care and stimulation a child receives, the greater the benefit for the national economy as well as the child. The world is finally recognizing that a child's rights to education, growth and development – physical, cognitive, social, emotional and moral – cannot be met without a comprehensive approach to serving their needs from birth."

– UNICEF, The State of the World's Children, 1999

Youth

A young person can be at risk owing to a number of factors, including:

- poverty;
- a physical or learning disability;
- abuse or neglect;
- an alcoholic or substance-abusing parent; and
- geographic disadvantage – limited access to expertise and resources that could help.

The presence of one or more of these factors means the youth in turn may be at greater risk of:

- dropping out of school;
- alcohol or substance abuse;
- teen pregnancy;
- violence; and
- depression or suicide.

A learning community recognizes that traditional ways of learning may not be the most appropriate form for at-risk youth and is willing to explore other, more innovative ways – such as service learning and mentorship programs – to reach young people, enhance their self-esteem by proving that they are able to learn, and keep them involved with their community.

> *The 137,000 youth who did not graduate high school in 1987 will cost Canadian society $1.7 billion in lost taxes.*
>
> *– Conference Board of Canada*

The benefits again, like those for good pre-natal and early childhood care, are young people who grow up to become healthy and productive adults who are an asset to, rather than a drain on, the justice system, the health care and welfare systems, and the community as a whole.

Business

More and more business leaders are coming to recognize the importance of "intellectual capital," the intangible assets of a company contained in the skills, knowledge and expertise of its workers.

Businesses that continue to invest in their existing intellectual capital – by providing formal and non-formal learning opportunities – have a greater ability to grow and change than do businesses that are content simply to stay with the status quo. These are the ones who get left behind as newer, more modern companies move in.

> *"In a competitive economy and inclusive society, every employer must be an investor and every worker a learner."*
>
> *– "Unions on the Learning Curve," The Monitor, National Council for Vocational Qualifications, Issue 4 Summer, 1997*

Businesses that choose to invest in future intellectual capital – in encouraging the development of new workers within the community – can have an even greater advantage: a willing workforce, right here at home, that is already well on the way to possessing exactly the right skills.

The value of this kind of community goodwill alone, the goodwill produced by encouraging more local employment, is incalculable.

Conclusion

Organized learning communities are still in the experimental or exploratory stage around the world; we do not yet have definitive evaluations of their successes and weaknesses.

What we do know, however, is that people – ordinary people, workers and parents, not just community officials or business owners – truly like this concept, because it puts them in the centre as the foundation of all future community development and adjustment to a new global, knowledge-based economy. And that means it is something government needs to support and invest in through such programs as Community Enterprise.

At the same time, we also know that the time for top-down decisions from the provincial (and federal) government is past, and that community development must happen from the ground up if it is to be successful. Communities today want and need the power to shape their own futures, and they want and need governments to work together to support their efforts.

In order to support B.C. communities to become stronger and healthier, more resilient and sustainable, the B.C. government is committed to:

- providing communities – particularly resource-based communities that are currently going through significant economic adjustment – with the resources and tools they need to address their most pressing issues; and to
- working with the federal government to coordinate our support to learning communities.

Through this collaboration, communities will be able to access funds from both the Ministry of Community Development, Cooperatives and Volunteers and the federal Learning Community Network for their projects. Joint research and evaluation of what works best in communities will also be conducted.